

A4 CENTRAL ILLINOIS

Decatur, Illinois • Wednesday, November 17, 1999

JACKSON: Plans another vigil today

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School Superintendent Ken Arndt said the school board believes its decision to keep the one-year expulsion in place was "educationally sound" and said that outside pressure would not cause the board to change its stance.

He did, however, leave the door open at least a crack for further negotiation.

"I've been in this business long enough to know that you never say never because you don't know what might happen," he said. "But right now I feel the board of education has been more than generous with its time."

Arndt said he hoped Jackson would refrain from further acts of civil disobedience because the media-attracting demonstrations are a distraction for teachers and students.

Jackson expected to be arrested Tuesday afternoon when he crossed the police line at Eisenhower High School. And he vowed to continue the Rainbow/PUSH fight on Tuesday to have the students returned to school.

"The board is standing by their original decision. And we're standing by ours," Jackson said. "And I'm canceling my schedule for the rest of the week — We're going to be in Decatur every day."

But what Jackson intended to be a peaceful demonstration Tuesday saw two police officers struck, and one of them injured — causing four arrested men to be preliminarily charged with felony mob action.

"So much for nonviolence," Macon County State's Attorney Larry Fichter said in a late afternoon news conference that occurred as Jackson appeared in court.

Fichter said the officer was "injured when struck" during the incident, requiring medical treatment. He said the officer was treated and released, but would not describe the nature or severity of the injuries.

Jackson said the injuries did not come from Rainbow/PUSH representatives or supporters, but from the throngs of media that crowded around him at the school.

Jackson's arrest came after a morning meeting with Goetter, Arndt and school district attorney Jeffrey Taylor failed to reach an acceptable compromise.

At Eisenhower, Jackson was encircled by a swarm of media after exiting his car. Jackson said nothing until he asked his security people to bring the parents of the expelled children forward. It appeared that many, if not all, of the parents eventually arrived, as did the students.

Jackson told the crowd that he, the parents and the pastors would cross the police line and risk arrest because the school board refused to consider allowing the students to go back to school in January.

"When this battle is over, (the expelled students) must honor this sacrifice," he said.

Shortly thereafter, he halted his speech and began walking about 30 yards to the police line, refusing to answer the questions shouted by reporters.

Officers did not attempt to physically prevent him from crossing the line. They allowed him through and Decatur police Lt. David Slade arrested him.

Above the roar of the crowd, Slade grasped a compliant Jackson by the arm and informed him of the charges.

"You're under arrest for contributing to the delinquency of a minor and solicitation to commit a crime," he said, before passing Jackson on to officers who handcuffed him and walked him to a waiting transport van.

The Macon County Law Enforcement Center was sealed off as the police van with Jackson arrived. Entrance doors were locked and several officers stood guard, blocking Jackson's associates, the press and curious onlookers.

A crowd quickly gathered outside, blocking South Franklin Street for about two hours. A few hundred spectators quickly started a chant of "send the children in, let the reverend out."

Meanwhile, ministers huddled to talk strategy every few minutes as more members of the media arrived. But by about 3:30 p.m., much of the crowd retreated from the chilling wind and cold temperatures in the shadow of the county jail.

Inside the jail, nearly 30 people, mostly courthouse employees, sat waiting for Jackson and the others arrested at Eisenhower.

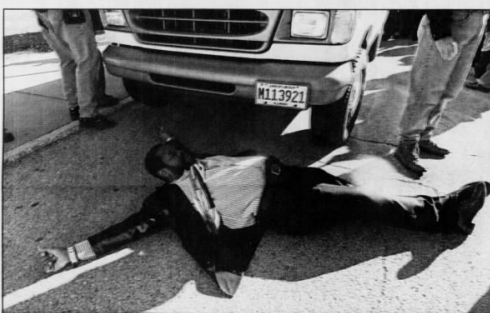
Jackson was brought into Courtroom No. 1 for his first appearance dressed in black, his

'When this battle is over, (the expelled students) must honor this sacrifice.'

The Rev. Jesse Jackson



DISCUSSION: The emergency school board meeting Tuesday night at the Keil Administration building was filled with teachers, parents and members of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition. Here, Valerie Johnson education director of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, discusses school discipline with parents and teachers.



FOR THE CAUSE: The Rev. Cleo Willis of Saint Louis, Mo. drops to the pavement Tuesday at Eisenhower High School trying to block the police vehicle carrying the Rev. Jesse Jackson. Willis was arrested on charges of aggravated battery and felony action.

Tuesday's developments

The Rev. Jesse Jackson was arrested Tuesday afternoon while leading a group of supporters to the front door of Eisenhower High School. In addition to Jackson, three others were arrested. All four were later released from the Macon County Jail. Jackson's arrest came after a meeting with school district officials failed to reach an acceptable compromise. Jackson later led a group of more than 700 residents at a rally at the Church of the Living God, P.O. Temple 3, characterized by thunderous chants and a "renewed fire" for the fight to return the students to school.

The Decatur school board, meeting in special session, reaffirmed its stance on the issue of the six expelled students. The board also voted to hire additional legal representation. In a statement read by board President Jackie Goetter, the board said that anyone wishing to challenge the decision to expel the students for the remainder of the school year with the option of alternative schooling will have to do so in court.

What's next

A prayer vigil is scheduled for 7 a.m. today at MacArthur High School. Jackson said the day's agenda will be determined and discussed then. A Rainbow/PUSH Coalition representatives plan to file a lawsuit today against the Decatur school board, alleging the district released personal student information to the media. It's alleged that, in releasing collective data on student absences and school class status, the board violated student privacy laws.

Jackson quickly ranged from angry to jovial, sarcastic to very direct while discussing topics ranging from a perceived misrepresentation of the expulsion issue by the media and the "strumped up" charges.

Jackson said jail, sometimes, is a necessary part of fighting for equal rights.

"On July 17, 1960, I went to jail for trying to use a public library," he said. "Righteous people fighting for a righteous cause have the power to open up jail cells."

During his address, Jackson told the story of a white woman who approached coalition representatives this week about her son who was caught with a knife at school but received a three-day suspension.

"We're trying to close the gap," he said. "We really don't want a deal, we want an even playing field."

"We want one set of rules."

ANALYSIS: Two sides still butting heads on issues

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handcuffs Tuesday afternoon after crossing a police line during a protest at Eisenhower High School. When he entered the story just over two weeks ago he made it clear that the students' two-year expulsions were unjustified and too severe.

In an emergency meeting Nov. 8, the school board voted 5-2 to reduce the expulsions from two years to one and agreed to allow the students to enroll in an alternative education program offered in Decatur.

Craig Milligan, Macon-Platt regional superintendent, said Tuesday that once the students enroll, they will be assessed and placed in the program that best fits their needs. He said it's likely that at least one of the young men would be placed in each of the four programs his department oversees.

At first, it seemed that Jackson agreed to the compromise, which was brokered by Gov. George H. Ryan and Glenn W. McGee, superintendent of the Illinois State Board of Education.

But he didn't. Jackson soon unveiled a new 10-point proposal for the reinstatement of the students, which called for the students to enroll in an alternative school program

and sought the establishment of a blue ribbon panel to determine whether the students made enough progress to warrant their return to the regular high school program for second semester in January.

Jackson's 10-point proposal asked for McGee to speak with Macon County State's Attorney Larry Fichter about reducing or dropping the felony mob action charges against the young men, a charge Jackson himself now faces. It also asked for a resolution to the federal lawsuit Rainbow/PUSH filed a week ago.

Tuesday, the school board met to discuss the issue of the expulsions, but its position didn't budge.

They met in executive session for nearly three hours, presumably going over Jackson's proposal point by point, but then didn't vote on the proposal.

The inaction should not have been a surprise, though. Throughout the week, board members said over and over that they had done their compromising.

When the board returned from executive session, they did take one vote — a 7-0 decision to hire additional legal counsel to help handle the pending lawsuits.

Board President Jackie Goetter then read a statement which said the board would not compromise further, and if the parents of the students were not satisfied, they could file additional lawsuits.

The Rev. James Meeks, Rainbow/PUSH vice president, was irate.

"I cannot believe that this school board would not take the opportunity to heal these wounds and solve this crisis," he said. "Decatur Superintendent Kenneth Arndt said the previous action by the board was common sense. 'We've done what we know is educationally sound for all students,' he said. 'For the 5,000 attending schools right now and for the students who were expelled.'"

Meanwhile, Jackson and his supporters will hold a court security vigil at MacArthur High School this morning, and the school board has no further plans to meet this week.